

## Overview Report

# People Select Committee

## Overview Meeting 2021

1 March 2021

### Finance, Development and Business Services

#### Context

The Council has a strong track record of sound financial management. In the current economic climate, finances are always going to be a challenge, and we work hard to make our budget go further. We have adapted to unprecedented funding reductions over the last eight years, saving around £53m (we refer to £45m up to 2019/20 in MTFP Reports). Our medium-term financial planning approach has allowed us to continually balance our budget through delivering savings and efficiencies but also to plan ahead and deliver invest-to-save schemes and innovative changes to service delivery models. We carefully target investments to stimulate economic growth, provide great assets and deliver financial returns to offset funding reductions.

Since the initial development of this Council Plan we have and still are experiencing the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Coronavirus provides huge challenges for us to address in terms of community and economic recovery and dealing with the long-term implications of the pandemic. We have reviewed our priorities for the coming year and have adapted these to reflect the focus that is needed to respond to this challenge.

The challenge for all Members is to ensure that decisions about the basis on which services will be delivered are within the resources available, taking account of a number of factors such as the uncertain financial position, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction.

Members are reminded of the Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

- A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm, where:
  - People live in cohesive and safe communities
  - People are supported and protected from harm
  - People live health lives
- A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed, creating:
  - A growing economy
  - Improved education and skills development
  - Job creation and increased employment
- A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive, creating:
  - Great places to live and visit
  - Clean and green spaces
  - Rich cultural experiences

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The Council plays its part in making sure this is achieved by being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

### Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis to Executive Scrutiny Committee. Please see the link:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SCR>

### Finance, Development and Business Services – Director – Garry Cummings

Services include:

- Finance Services
- Inclusive Growth, Planning & Development Services
- Housing Services
- Strategic Procurement & Governance
- Revenues & Benefits Services

### Council Plan 2020-2023

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

The key priorities for 2021-22 for the Finance and Business Services themes are attached at Appendix 1.

### Emerging Issues

Like all areas across the Council, services have been impacted by the Covid pandemic and have provided significant support to residents, businesses and also other services across the Council.

Service delivery is influenced by a range of internal and external factors that develop over time. Emerging challenges and opportunities are summarised as follows:

#### What has been achieved

##### Cross Directorate

- Established a new Directorate whilst everyone working remotely. Notably a full new team within Inclusive Growth and Development Services
- Provided direct support to business and residents during the pandemic and support to other Council Services

##### **Finance Services**

##### Key Achievements

- Reviewed and updated Medium Term Financial Plan, balanced budget and robust forward plan

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- Administered a significant amount of Covid funding, providing reports to members and Government, notably business grants and hardship funds
- Supporting significant work and lobbying around spending review, review of Local Government Finance which was delayed
- Annual Accounts and Governance Statement approved and positive Value for Money Statement

### Priorities, challenges and opportunities

- Continued uncertainty around National Funding (Spending Review, Fair Funding Review and Review of Business Rates Retention)
- Continue to maintain robust MTFP and provide support to response to Covid

## **Inclusive Growth, Planning & Development Services**

### Key Achievements

- Developed plans for Employment and Skills hub
- Developed approach to Inclusive Growth, including plans to acquire key employment sites
- Administered hundreds of business grants
- Provided advice, guidance and support to businesses affected by the pandemic

### Priorities, challenges and opportunities

- Economic Downturn nationally due to Covid
- Support to businesses when we move out of lockdown
- Continue to work with developers to bring forward key sites to generate employment
- Develop Employment and Skills hub to support people into employment, both the long term unemployed as well as those affected by Covid
- Develop a strategy to promote the Borough for inward investment
- Undertake a review of Council land and assets, identifying sites for disposal or development (including Housing)

## **Housing Services**

### Key Achievements

- Solution to bring forward development of Elm House site using Brownfield funding
- Significant support to public and particularly vulnerable people has been maintained throughout the pandemic
- Working with a range of providers to secure additional units of emergency accommodation to support those who would otherwise have been at risk of rough sleeping

### Priorities, challenges and opportunities

- Undertake a Specialist Housing Needs Assessment to inform future plans and strategies
- Develop options for further brownfield funding to bring forward sites
- Develop options for delivering affordable housing, including joint ventures
- Continued support to the boroughs most vulnerable residents and those who may find themselves at risk of homelessness

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### **Strategic Procurement & Governance**

#### Key Achievements

- Provided significant support to Care sector throughout the pandemic, including;
  - Co-ordinating PPE
  - Additional payments
  - Liaison and support
  - Testing
  - Vaccine rollout
- Established a brokerage team to organise care packages,
- Administered supplier relief payments to businesses affected by the pandemic
- Health and safety advice, including risk assessments, to all services including schools
- Developed a revised approach to internal audit and risk management
- Proposal for care fees

#### Priorities, challenges and opportunities

- Negotiate and implement new care fees
- Impact of Brexit on procurement rules

### **Revenues and Benefits**

#### Key Achievements

- Administered significant number £60m of business support grants
- Administered £33m of business rate relief
- Administered hardship fund supporting 12,000 LCTS clients
- Administered £250k of emergency grant assistance to households in need of food and basic essentials
- Provided hardship and welfare support to increased numbers of residents
- Continued to collect Council Tax and Business rates in difficult circumstances
- Deferred council tax payments for over 1,700 residents affected by the pandemic
- Administered additional number of claims for LCTS scheme
- Completed review of LCTS scheme, albeit deferring to this year
- Administered relief payments to businesses affected by the pandemic
- Delivered phase 1 of online access to information and automation project

#### Priorities, challenges and opportunities

- Potential additional business rate reliefs to administer
- Collect council tax and business rates in challenging circumstances
- Prepare for business rate revaluation and review of business rate review
- Further review of LCTS scheme
- Online access to information
- Review of income collection

### **Potential Areas for In-Depth Review**

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2021-22. Using the information provided as part of the performance updates and this

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Overview meeting, the Committee is invited to identify potential topics for review within this theme.

Potential topics will be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 23 March.

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## Appendix 1

### **Council Plan - Key Priorities 2020- 2021 – Finance, Development and Business Services**

Making the Borough a place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed means creating:

- A growing economy
- Improved education and skills development
- Job creation and increased employment

We have identified these key priorities for 2021/22 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Promote inward investment in the Borough and develop opportunities for increasing employment land
- Work with Tees Valley Combined Authority on improving regional economic and transport infrastructure
- Provide support to Training and Employment through the implementation and development of the Employment and trainings Hub

Making the Borough a place that is clean, vibrant and attractive means creating:

- Great places to live and visit
- Clean and green spaces
- Rich cultural experiences

We have identified these key priorities for 2020/21 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Undertake a Specialist Housing Needs Assessment to inform future plans and strategies
- Continue with the re-development of the Sycamores estate including Elm House
- Develop options for accelerating affordable housing including use of Council land and delivery models.
- Review delivery of the private landlord-led membership scheme

We are committed to being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve This means we will provide:

- Financial sustainability and value for money
- Dedicated and resourceful employees
- Strong leadership and governance

We have identified these key priorities for 2020/21 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Review our medium-term financial plan following the national budget changes, including the financial implications of recovery from Coronavirus

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- Review the Councils land and assets and develop plans for disposal or development, including office accommodation in preparation for the new facilities.
- Improve our online services for Revenues and Benefits customers.